

PARK AVENUE NEIGHBORHOOD STRATEGIC REDEVELOPMENT PLAN



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SUBMITTED TO

**THE PARK AVENUE NEIGHBORHOOD
&
THE CITY OF SALISBURY**

PREPARED BY

**NEIGHBORING CONCEPTS
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By virtue of its history and proximity, the Park Avenue neighborhood has extraordinary potential for the future. Cooperative efforts of the neighborhood and the City have begun to stabilize social conditions, and the larger community is showing interest. These factors suggest that a bright future is imminent. The goal of redevelopment should be to encourage and direct the process to reach this vision.

The prospects of a viable future, however, should not distract from some current obstacles. There are areas in need of attention that can be either a source of strength or a glaring weakness. One role of the Plan is to pinpoint these areas and address their repair in a strategic fashion.

The primary strengths of the Park Avenue neighborhood are:

- 1) The historic buildings and streets;
- 2) Its proximity to downtown Salisbury; and
- 3) A base of stable, loyal residents.

The objective of the Strategic Redevelopment Plan is to provide a guide for implementing the vision that the residents have developed for the future of their community. The Plan identifies key areas and opportunities for emphasis in development activity. The strategy to revitalize Park Avenue is based on four assumptions:

- It assumes that there is potential for this neighborhood to be better. This means that when we have mitigated the negative forces impacting the neighborhood's image, there will be a market for the new and renovated housing and commercial spaces. The development trends in Salisbury strongly suggest that this is the case, particularly for an historic neighborhood near downtown. There also appears to be a strong market for smaller houses, less than \$100,000, and indeed for houses above that figure in stable, close-in neighborhoods.
- It assumes that the redevelopment of the neighborhood will take place in partnership with outside groups. This means that various City agencies, the Historic Salisbury Foundation, Downtown Salisbury, Inc., private foundations, consultants and other business partners will be involved with and benefit from the efforts to renew Park Avenue.
- It assumes that revitalization will depend on appealing to people from outside the community, as well as to the current residents. This means that the neighborhood's image to the larger community is an important element to its rebirth. Thus development should respond not only to the residents' needs and vision, but also to the dreams and desires of those who do not yet live here.
- It assumes that the new Park Avenue will be a community of diversity. This means that the neighborhood will have a variety of housing types and prices and a careful mix of non-residential uses.

STUDY DISTRICTS

The Park Avenue neighborhood is composed of a series of loosely defined districts, each with a distinctive character, as well as specific strengths and weaknesses. This document addresses these districts individually, focusing on those nearest the neighborhood core. It discusses the key development moves in each, and outlines a comprehensive, strategic approach to implementing the community's vision for the future.

1. **The Cannon Park District** is the neighborhood core, characterized by older houses, many of them historic and many in need of significant repair. The plan envisions this heart of the neighborhood as the starting point for the revitalization.
2. **The Long Street Corridor** comprises a group of commercial / light industrial buildings, as well as some older houses, along a street with a non-pedestrian character. This area is critical to forming a connection with Downtown.
3. **The Council Street District** is a major gateway to Downtown, with older commercial buildings with potential for renovation. It also contains the majority of developable land in the neighborhood, centered around Tar Branch Creek.
4. **The Pauline Knitting District** is similar to the adjacent Cannon Park district. It includes the majority of the houses in need of significant repair, as well as vacant tracts and some downtrodden commercial buildings. Also in this area, though, are some excellent houses and a major opportunity.
5. **The Bringle Ferry Road District** includes some of the better housing stock in the neighborhood and could offer an attractive edge, but which suffers from heavy traffic along this thoroughfare.
6. **The Lafayette Court District** encompasses two developments of the Salisbury Housing Authority, 61 family units and 116 elderly. This area is cut off from the rest of the neighborhood, both physically and socially.
7. **The Kesler Street District** is a collection of modest rental houses with potential for more effective use, as a strategic part of a program to develop home ownership.
8. **The Town Creek Mall District** is a heavily-trafficked area with excellent access to major roads, but which exhibits a mixture of dreary buildings, vacant land and a few businesses of note.

DISTRICTS 1, 2 & 3

1. The Cannon Park

District is the neighborhood core characterized by older houses, many of them historic and many in need of significant repair.

The plan proposes:

- Renovation of houses in this area and the resale of those houses to new homeowners
- Renovation of Cannon Park
- Renovation and reuse of the buildings at Park Avenue and Boundary Street, possibly for a Community Resource Center, day care, support functions for Cannon Park, or other community activities
- Streetscape improvements and traffic calming techniques along Boundary Street and Park Avenue, as major thoroughfares through the neighborhood, and tree planting along Liberty from the park to Long Street, as part of the pocket parks along Tar Creek.
- Partner with the Historic Salisbury Foundation to save and restore the more significant houses in the neighborhood, and support zoning changes to allow uses to support the cost, such as professional offices or Bed and Breakfast.

2. The Long Street

Corridor is a group of commercial / light industrial buildings, as well as some older houses, along a street with a non-pedestrian character.

The plan proposes:

- Intensive study of streetscape improvements to forge the vital link between downtown and the neighborhood
- Traffic calming techniques and intersection improvements, particularly at Council Street
- Renovation of houses above Park Avenue for professional offices
- Development of a pedestrian loop between Council and Kerr Streets to extend the commercial character of the Train Station area across the tracks, and encourage connections with the Train Station, possibly at the end of Liberty Street.

3. The Council Street

District is a major gateway to Downtown, with older commercial buildings with potential for renovation, as well as large areas of vacant land.

The plan proposes:

- Renovation of the existing gateway buildings (Cheerwine, etc.) between Long Street and the Train Station
- Package the vacant property for extensive housing development in the neighborhood
- Develop a series of pocket parks along Tar Branch to beautify the area and provide a focus for the new housing
- Streetscape improvements from the railroad tracks to Boundary Street

DISTRICTS 4 & 5

4. The Pauline Knitting District is similar to the adjacent Cannon Park area. It includes the majority of the houses in need of significant repair, as well as vacant tracts and some downtrodden commercial buildings. Also in this area, though, are some excellent houses and a major opportunity.

The plan proposes:

- Renovation and resale of houses in this area
- Feasibility study for future uses of Pauline Knitting, including possibilities for “factory retail” (the current use), business incubator, housing, farmers market or mixed use
- Partner with the Historic Salisbury Foundation to save and restore the more significant houses in the neighborhood, and support zoning changes to allow uses to support the cost

5. The Bringle Ferry Road District includes some of the better housing stock in the neighborhood and could offer an attractive edge, but which suffers from heavy traffic along this thoroughfare.

The plan proposes:

- Infrastructure improvements to ease the impact of traffic and improve the image of the neighborhood on this side
- Infill housing to strengthen the street character
- Redevelopment of the Trailer Park site as townhomes

DISTRICTS 6, 7 & 8

6. The Lafayette Court

District encompasses two developments of the Salisbury Housing Authority, 61 family units and 116 elderly. This area is cut off from the rest of the neighborhood, both physically and socially.

The plan proposes:

- Connections with residents, through shared functions and inclusion in the neighborhood organization, and eventual physical connections with the development.

7. The Kesler Street

District is a collection of modest homes.

The plan proposes:

- Use of these houses as starter homes or as transitional housing; for example, in a program for Housing Authority residents to lease as the first step toward home ownership.

8. The Town Creek Mall

District is a heavily-trafficked area with excellent access to major roads, but which exhibits a mixture of dreary buildings, vacant land and a few businesses of note.

The plan proposes:

- Inclusion of Arlington Street in the new development on the Town Creek Mall site
- Enhance the Arlington Street entrance into the neighborhood
- Develop the site without the parcel between I-85 and the creek, leaving this area open as a landscaped gateway to the city
- Reuse of the Duke Power building for a more active use as part of or related to the commercial development
- Softening the transition between the neighborhood and the new commercial center.

INITIAL PROJECTS

Acquisition, Renovation and Resale of Rental Houses to New Homeowners

The existing neighborhood is characterized by a number of charming homes, many of which need minor to moderate renovation, and some scattered houses in need of more serious repair. There is also an established infrastructure of roads, sidewalks and drainage in relatively good shape, and an impressive growth of trees on most streets. There is a high percentage of absentee landlords and the conversion of a large number of these units to home-ownership is an ultimate goal of the plan. Crime is a concern; however, it is for the most part related to specific areas.

Redevelopment efforts within the core of the existing neighborhood should focus on the selective acquisition, rehab and subsequent sale of houses to homeowners. A windshield survey of current housing conditions identified roughly 75 houses in need of serious repairs. The approach should be to target the worst houses on any block and transform them into the best houses, thus raising the image of the entire block. In this manner, a few houses can have a major impact.

This plan suggests that the neighborhood group, in partnership with a developer or consultant, would purchase and rehab houses for sale. The developer would identify and negotiate for the houses, coordinate the work, and deliver the house ready for resale or for lease-purchase. The role of the neighborhood would be as a conduit for city and private funds to finance the venture. This system could turn over between five and ten houses per year, and could generate a significant amount of capital for other neighborhood improvement projects.

Streetscape Analysis

There are a number of streets that are particularly strategic for the long term viability of the neighborhood. The plan suggests that a thorough analysis of these streets be undertaken as a first step in a program to improve the streetscape, and therefore the neighborhood image, in these critical areas. The analysis should focus four aspects of the street: sidewalks, landscaping, traffic and utilities. The key streets are:

- **Long Street**

Due to its proximity to downtown and its high traffic count, this area has potential as an important commercial district and link to downtown, as well as a highly visible “front door” to the neighborhood. In its current state, however, it is a major barrier to extending the success of downtown beyond the railroad tracks. The decidedly unfriendly character of this street is among the strongest impediments to the revitalization and future viability of the Park Avenue neighborhood. Intersection improvements, particularly at Council Street and at Park Avenue, street narrowing, traffic calming, landscaping and other improvements can have significant benefits both to the neighborhood and the commercial potential of the corridor. Future development in this area should focus on office / business space, with perhaps a carefully placed housing component. This use capitalizes on the nearness to the City Center, easy access to major roads and highways, and the availability of land for parking.

- **Council Street**

Another key street to developing a link with downtown, Council Street has potential to be the primary gateway into the neighborhood. As such, it deserves careful treatment. In addition, though, it traverses the largest areas of undeveloped land in the neighborhood. Tar Branch Creek cuts through this area, and its topography defines the edge of the intensive residential fabric of the neighborhood core. Improvements to the creek, along with streetscape improvements along Council Street, can set the stage for major infill residential developments in this area.

- **Boundary Street**

As a popular cut through to Bringle Ferry Road, Boundary Street is among the most visible in the neighborhood. It therefore presents an opportunity to present a positive image to the larger community. It also has a need for careful consideration of the impact of this traffic flow and the potential benefits of traffic calming measures.

- **Liberty Street**

By virtue of its proximity to Long Street, Cannon Park and the proposed Tar Branch pocket parks, Liberty Street can become a strategic piece in the redevelopment plan.

- **Park Avenue**

No street is more closely connected to the overall impression of the neighborhood than Park Avenue itself. It already has impressive landscaping and houses; with attention to maintenance and improvements to other aspects of the streetscape, this avenue could easily become the identifying image of the revitalized community.

Renovation of Cannon Park

Another emphasis of the neighborhood group in the revitalization of Park Avenue is the ongoing effort to redevelop Cannon Park at the heart of the neighborhood. The primary advantages of Park Avenue are its location and character; the improvements to the park will capitalize on that location and be an important step in the “discovery” of the neighborhood. Previously this park was used largely by outside groups; this use was often perceived as a source of crime and other social problems in the neighborhood.

The City has been proactive in removing the ball park and this has significantly reduced traffic from outside the neighborhood. The next step is to redevelop the park with appropriate facilities related to the neighborhood’s residents. It should be oriented to casual interaction and non-structured play, and it should respond to the desires and activities of the residents. The Plan strongly suggests that residents, particularly youth, be closely involved in the design and the overall process. This will both help to ensure that the design is appropriate for their needs and help to foster a sense of ownership in the park and the public process in general.

The park is important not only for the recreation it can offer; its location and character make it the heart of the community. Cannon Park can be the galvanizing force to the redevelopment of the neighborhood core, which is the strategic first step to the overall revitalization of the neighborhood. Its redevelopment will set the tone for everything else that occurs here, and will represent to the larger community the future of this neighborhood and the commitment of the city toward its success.

Feasibility study for the Buildings at Park Avenue and Boundary Street

The most common theme of the residents' presentations about their neighborhood is the recognition of the importance of the old commercial and industrial buildings in their midst. The ones that capture the most attention are the pair at the corner of Park Avenue and Boundary Street. As with Cannon Park across the street, this location is the heart of the neighborhood and its strongest image. While these buildings are dilapidated and empty, the neighborhood looks derelict and abandoned; new life here will signal the rebirth of this entire section of the city.

The plan strongly suggests that a feasibility study be undertaken to determine the potential for viable uses for these buildings, perhaps in conjunction with the renovations at Cannon Park.

Tar Branch Park

As mentioned previously, Tar Branch Creek creates an edge to the neighborhood core and defines an underdeveloped section of the neighborhood. Because of the strategic location of this area, between Innes Street and Council Street, connecting the neighborhood core to the major gateway to downtown, this area has intriguing possibilities as the primary development site for future housing. The development of the creek beds is a key element of this strategy. The plan supports the concept of a series of pocket parks along the undeveloped floodways. These parks will improve the image of the area and benefit current residents, but they will also act as focal points for new housing and as a catalyst for development of the missing link between the neighborhood and more viable commercial areas.

Communication Links

While the plan focuses on the physical aspects of the neighborhood's redevelopment strategy, there are important social aspects as well. Parts of the neighborhood have become isolated, usually by the perception of their role in the decline of the neighborhood. The plan proposes an effort by the neighborhood to open communication with some of these groups, including:

- **The Speedee Mart**

Believed by residents to be a contributing factor to litter, crime and loitering, this store also serves an important commercial function for the neighborhood. Its owner has shown his commitment to the community by attending neighborhood meetings and has curtailed some of the sales that contributed to the problems. Continued cooperation between the neighborhood and the store can do much to alleviate problems and the perception of problems related to the store.

- **Apartments at Park Avenue and Long Street**

Also considered a source of many social problems in the neighborhood. Communication with the owners, managers and residents can help maintain a safer environment and ease the distrust.

- **Salisbury Housing Authority communities along Lafayette Street**

These developments, one for families and one for the elderly and disabled, are isolated physically and socially from the remainder of the neighborhood. There is currently no organization among the residents. The plan proposes that the neighborhood reach out to involve these folks in the activities of the neighborhood.

- **Cambridge Properties (Town Creek Mall site)**

The future of this site has important implications for both the neighborhood and the City as a whole. As the front door to Salisbury from I-85, the development of this site can have a huge impact on the image of the city for thousands of drivers everyday. Just as importantly, the site can act as an entrance into the Park Avenue neighborhood. Communication with the developers can ease their mind about conditions and the future of the neighborhood behind their site.